

5.3. Expand distribution and use of key insights from research and analysis

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product and marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

TAC, ITRR, MTOT

- » Set a research agenda – incorporating academic research (ITRR), market research, and analytics – to identify and prioritize key research questions. Emphasize research questions that can directly:
 - inform and improve marketing decisions;
 - inform resource allocations;
 - identify important and targetable market segments (using data-driven segments as well as demographic or psychographic segments);
 - improve knowledge of travel motivations;
 - understand the travel patterns and expenditures of specific segments;
 - identify ways to improve visitor experiences;
 - identify ways to extend the length of trips or the level of visitor expenditures; or
 - measure tourism's economic impact for Montana.
- » Use research and analysis to the fullest extent to ensure informed decisions regarding all activities.
- » Improve stakeholder use of ITRR and other research by emphasizing distribution of insights from research – succinct notes on a specific finding that tie the finding to its practical application in the operations of stakeholders. For example, ITRR's 2011 Tourism Outlook reported on “top Montana attributes important to nonresident visitors”. An insight could note that the top 5 are clean air, clean waterways, watchable wildlife, scenic vistas, and open space, and suggest that stakeholders check their websites to see if these attributes are reflected in images used. The report also indicated that access to public lands and access to waterways were ranked as “very important” by visitors. This could lead to a recommendation that stakeholders add nearby access points in their print and online visitor information and make sure their frontline staff knows about local access points.
- » Improve stakeholder awareness of ITRR research. For example, include research insights (with a link to the full report) in each MTOT newsletter.
- » Make it easy for stakeholders to find ITRR research to meet specific, immediate information needs. For example, include links to ITRR research within the Resource Library organized by practical topics or questions that tourism stakeholders might be seeking to address; enhance the search capabilities on the ITRR website; or adopt a common set of categories and terms used by MTOT, ITRR, and the TAC to tag and organize information for stakeholders.
- » Continue and enhance collection of non-resident data by ITRR, ensuring that survey questions continue to provide valid data to meet the identified research needs of the tourism community.

- » Make use of research conducted by or for other destinations.
- » Utilize literature reviews of (non-ITRR) academic research as a cost-effective means to answer more general questions regarding best practices and tourism trends (for example, trends in sources of visitor information, traveler use of mobile devices or electronic word-of-mouth, factors in visitor satisfaction, geotraveler trends).
- » Utilize the most current electronic tools, such as web analytics and online review and feedback mechanisms, to gain insights into visitors and the market.

Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes

- » Suggest items for the state-wide research agenda.
- » Use key insights from academic and marketing research to guide strategic and marketing planning.
- » Explore cost effective means for local/regional data collection at existing points of contact, for example: surveys conducted by event, attraction, or amenity operators; or aggregation of lodging data.
- » Utilize electronic tools, such as web analytics and online review and feedback mechanisms, to gain insights into visitors and the market.
- » Disseminate key insights from academic and marketing research to local stakeholders.

Businesses & Organizations

- » Actively seek to apply the research and analysis to improve day-to-day operations.
- » Gather and use insights from electronic tools such as web analytics, analysis of data from ratings and review sites (e.g. TripAdvisor, Yelp); online reviews and feedback; and interaction through social media.
- » Help spread awareness of research insights from MTOT, ITRR, the TAC, Regions, and CVBs to colleagues.

Indicators of Success

- » A research agenda is adopted with direct ties to the business decisions and activities of stakeholders.
- » Key insights are disseminated and improve use of research and analysis by stakeholders.
- » Valid research and analysis plays a significant and overt role in guiding the strategic and marketing plans and decisions of stakeholders.
- » Research and analysis are available in the Resource Library, in a form that is easily accessed and digested by stakeholders.
- » Opportunities to collect additional valid data for marginal additional cost or effort are identified and implemented.

Background & Rationale

The value in research and analysis lies in its ability to improve the success of the industry as a whole and its stakeholders individually. Research – and allocation of resources to it – therefore must be driven by the needs of the industry and the potential to improve success.

Research “wish lists” can easily grow to be quite large and conducting primary research is often the first or only approach considered. To effectively use limited research resources, that wish list must be filtered down by asking “if we had this piece of information, how would it shape our decisions and activities?” Research questions that offer good strategic value should then be prioritized, with priority given to those that have the greatest potential for improving outcomes – improved economics, better visitor experiences, more effectiveness in operations or marketing, etc. The answers to priority research questions should be obtained in the most cost effective way.

A large body of research exists that is valid and offers insights that can be applied to Montana’s tourism sector. Literature reviews can draw upon this body of knowledge and be analyzed for implications for Montana, providing insights at far lower cost than conducting original survey research in Montana. Montana has compiled non-resident data for a number of years, and can extract additional insights from this valuable data set. Data segmentation offers great potential for understanding of the travel patterns of visitors, which is more useful in many regards than analysis of the aggregated data. By disaggregating data to examine the travel patterns of specific groups, both product and marketing could be better targeted. Disaggregation could be done not only by demographic segments, but also by segments identified by their travel motivations or by similar travel patterns. For example, Nickerson and Moisey (1999) reanalyzed existing non-resident data using cluster analysis to identify five distinct groups on the basis of what most attracted them to Montana. The study offered useful insights into the characteristics of the groups and suggested marketing strategies for each. Additional data-driven segmentation of this kind (versus traditional segmentation by demographic traits or origin) could offer unique insights.

Other emerging sources of data that might meet the needs of individual stakeholders include data mining from ratings and review sites (e.g., compiling ratings data; content analysis to determine the most common positive and negative comments.)

Resources

Other DMOs whose research can be tapped for insights relevant to Montana include:

- Alberta (good source of tourism research *not* specific to Alberta and highly applicable to Montana) <http://www.tpr.alberta.ca/tourism/research/>;
- California (esp. for rural tourism) <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Research/Travel-Market-Research/>;
- Saskatchewan (esp. for Canadian and US travel trends) <http://www.industrymatters.com/Marketing-and-Research>;
- Oregon (esp. for national reports on outdoor recreation and adventure travel) <http://industry.traveloregon.com/research/archive/>;
- Idaho (many reports on topics of interest to Montana tourism) <http://commerce.idaho.gov/tourism-grants-and-resources/Research/>;

- Wyoming (to benchmark against a neighbor state's practices) <http://www.wyomingofficeoftourism.gov/industry/pages/Research/research.html>;
- South Dakota (to benchmark against a neighbor state's practices and for a limited amount of "other research" posted online) <http://www.sdvisit.com/tools/research/>;
- North Dakota (limited benchmarking and limited research on Canadian travel to the U.S.) <http://www.ndtourism.com/industry/>;
- Colorado (to benchmark cost reduction efforts and cost-effective approaches; to glean insights from contracted studies) <http://www.colorado.com/research>.